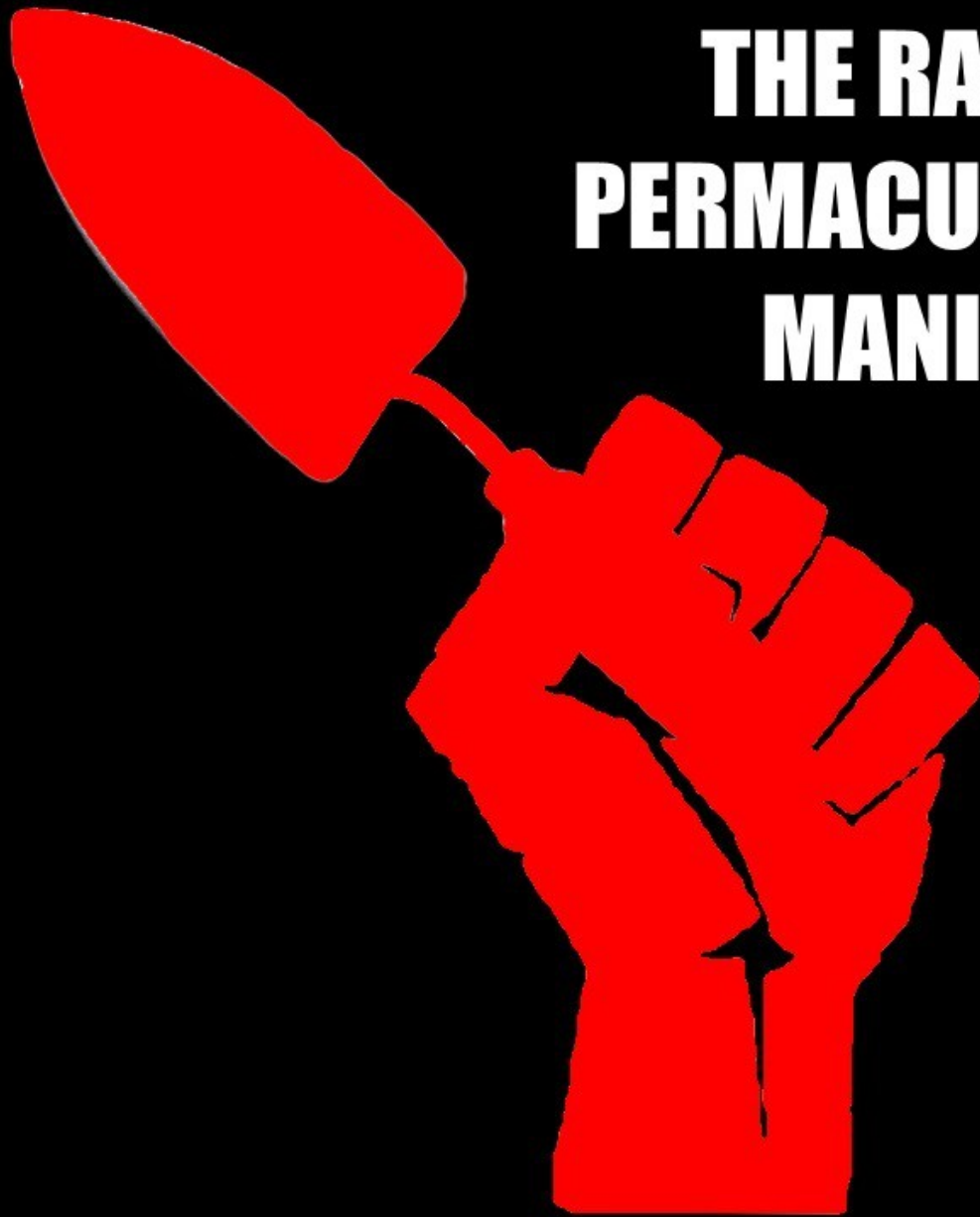


THE RADICAL PERMACULTURE MANIFESTO



WHAT IS RADICAL PERMACULTURE?

Permaculture is a design science based off of ecological patterns that aims to create a permanent, stable, and regenerative system of food production. There is no question that permaculture offers some great solutions to many of the ecological problems we face today and have been facing for decades now. However, while the ideas and methods of permaculture have experienced a sudden growth in recent years - and this is a good thing - it has not necessarily translated into these ideas being applied where they are most needed, and, more importantly, has not been sufficiently expanded upon outside the context of ecological design to bring about necessary changes towards community autonomy and self-reliance. In permaculture circles, when independence and autonomy are discussed, it's usually in the context of how an individual can separate themselves, oftentimes geographically, from the harmful structures present in society, especially when it comes to our choices regarding food. While this is okay, it promotes the idea that lifestyle changes are the most effective way to combat systemic injustices, and also creates a tendency for permaculture to disproportionately appeal to people who have the means to make those drastic lifestyle changes. Radical Permaculture is the idea that the autonomy, independence, and freedom of an individual are directly dependent on the ability of their whole community to achieve those things, and sees permaculture as one way to come closer to that goal. Radical Permaculture aims to create a decentralized network of individuals and collectives who take the best elements of permaculture and combine them with effective community organizing, education, and support to allow people and communities to regain control over their own lives.

While a Permaculture Design Certification (PDC) is a great, in-depth immersion in permaculture design, realistically, they are out of reach for most people. The high cost of PDCs makes them inaccessible to many, and the reverence for certain PDC instructors perpetuates the idea that some one must be an "expert" to be able to teach, and that only a select few are capable of teaching. This is not the case. We are all capable of teaching; we all know something worth sharing. With internet access available to most people at seemingly all hours of the day, there is no need to pay thousands of dollars to acquire knowledge. Become well-read in one subject, find a friend who is interesting in another, teach each other, rinse, and repeat. If a few people can find one another, even better. There is power in a group of motivated people, don't forget this.

ORGANIZING YOUR GROUP (PART I)

If you are the only person that you could find to be in your Radical Permaculture group, this part is easy. The ball is in your court, so do whatever you feel is a productive use of your time and energy. If you are having trouble finding people to organize with, don't feel discouraged - it can be hard work! Sometimes working alone can be most efficient anyway. However, if you do want to find others to work with, it could be useful to attend some events where like-minded people might congregate. Good places for this can be workshops or discussions hosted by local universities or political groups, community gardens, a local Food Not Bombs chapter, or if your town has an active DIY music scene, shows can be a great way of making connections with people who are interested in similar things and also have experience organizing events. After all, organizing a show in your basement isn't all that different from organizing a workshop in your basement.



Food Not Bombs can be a great resource for meeting people who might want to help you start a Radical Permaculture collective.

Image taken from <http://createourworld.wordpress.com/2009/06/08/food-not-bombs-richmond/>

If you are fortunate enough to have found some friends that want to work with you, then this step requires a bit more effort. Organizing your group is a critical part of being successful in the future. When it comes to creating a well-organized group, bigger does not always mean better. Of course, the more people you have, the bigger projects you can take on. However, dealing with large numbers of people can be very difficult. Even facilitating a discussion where everybody's voices are heard can prove to be a challenging task if nobody in the group has much experience dealing with this sort of thing. It's generally a good idea to start small and then expand if your group feels like it can do so without compromising its principles, while still being efficient and effective.

Part of the “Radical” in Radical Permaculture means confronting the harmful systems that we have to deal with in our day to day lives. We should acknowledge that certain problems are systemic and deeply rooted in most of our cultures; things like racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia, among many, many others. Our Radical Permaculture groups should go to whatever lengths are necessary to ensure that they are as free from these harmful ideas as possible. If a member of your group feels uncomfortable, unwelcome, or downright abused, that needs to be dealt with immediately. Not only is it unacceptable to let these things perpetuate simply because they hurt people, though that is reason enough, but as in an ecosystem, diversity is beneficial, and if one member of the group doesn't want to be there, that hurts everyone. In our gardens, increasing soil health is a better option than resorting to artificial fertilizers for our plants. We should treat our groups the same way. It is better to create an environment where members of the group are encouraged to contribute to their full potential than it is to hastily set up our groups without addressing any underlying problems that we may have and then resort to superficial solutions when confronted with those realities. And just like an occasional watering with some compost tea is good for soil biology, we shouldn't assume that dealing with these issues is something that we can forget about after one initial discussion. We must make sure that our groups not only are safe spaces, but that they *stay* safe spaces.

ORGANIZING YOUR GROUP (PART II)

After ensuring that you and your friends have created a safe environment for ideas to flourish, it might be a good idea to work out the roles that each member plays within the context of the group. If you have a member who is very interested in studying soil bacteria, it might be a good idea to let them be the “bacteria expert” in your group. Likewise, if you have someone who is good at graphic design, let them do graphic design (you're going to want a good-looking flyer to let people know about the discussion that you and your Rad Perma crew are leading at the local community center, right?). Ideally, every member of the group would know something or another about every member's area of expertise and in reality, there will likely be large overlaps, but it is still good for people to work on something that they find interesting. It is more fulfilling for them, and as long as your group has good communication and works well together, it will probably be better to have a group of people who know a lot about their respective subjects than to have a group of people who all know a little bit about everything. The gaps in between everyone's area of expertise can be filled in with some discussion. For example, a “mycology expert” and a “plant expert” should be able to work together to discuss which plants will grow well in an area, and then which mycorrhizal fungi to inoculate those plants with, but if your group members didn't even know about mycorrhizal associations because everyone has only a surface-level knowledge of general ecology, that is wasted potential.

Just like how our groups should confront those oppressive power relations mentioned before to create a safe environment for all members, so too should we be intentional in how we structure ourselves into units. There is nothing radical about recreating the same harmful power dynamics that we experience daily in our Radical Permaculture groups. Since your group should have already discussed how to keep the environment welcoming to all members, it is safe to assume that you value and respect everyone in your group, and that input from everyone is welcome. If this is the case, and it should be (if not, go back to “Organizing Your Group (Part I)” and make adjustments accordingly) then congratulations, your groups is already more democratic than most of the “outside” world! You and your group members will now have to decide for yourselves what type of structure you want for the group.

With smaller numbers, it should not be too hard to maintain a completely non-heirarchical structure, where everybody has the same overall power in the decision-making process. Under this structure, many groups use *consensus model decision-making*, which means that in order to reach a conclusion on a given issue, all members of the group must agree to the proposed solution. This promotes a healthy dialogue, and while everyone may have to compromise for this to work, it is arguably better than someone's ideas being ignored or overruled by a majority. If someone feels strongly enough about their position and is unwilling to compromise, they may have to sit out of the discussion and let the other members reach a conclusion in their absence. In this scenario, the individual who sat out might be able to go and do whatever they need to do to make their idea a reality on their own, without support from the group (or maybe even with support from the group. It's possible that the other members just don't want to use that idea for the whole group, but are happy to give support to their friend should they choose to do it on their own). Another possibility that might arise is that the member feels strongly enough that they cannot morally support the group's decision to carry out a certain action. In this case, a more serious discussion needs to take place about the direction that the group is heading in. Although these problems can arise, the consensus model is arguably the fairest and most democratic model out there. Other models of decision making include a simple majority (51% agreement), super majority (more than 51% - whatever the group decides is fair), a “dictatorship” (can

be useful if very quick decisions are needed in a high tension situation, but otherwise should probably be avoided), an “informed dictatorship” (where each member states their case to a leader, who then makes a decision based on the best presented argument), or your group can come up with something else entirely.

Although it is more democratic to have a leaderless structure, it can sometimes be a good idea to temporarily assign roles that carry more power than others. For example, if someone asks your group about doing a remediation project and you have a member who knows far more about remediation than the rest of the group, maybe they should be in charge for the duration of that project. This does not mean that other members don't get a say in what goes on in this project. It is simply an acknowledgment that one member has more experience in this field than the other group members, and that the group will probably be more successful if they run their ideas by that person and are open to that person's criticism. Likewise, things will probably run smoother if they let that person make some decisions on their behalf in cases where the rest of the group still collectively has less knowledge and experience than the temporary leader. It should be emphasized that after the project is done, the leader goes back to having the same amount of sway in decision-making as any other member of the group.

SKILLS

There are many skills that are going to be necessary, or at least helpful, when rubber hits the road. This list is an overview of some useful skills that you and other members of your collective may want to familiarize yourself with. Please be aware that this is not a comprehensive list.

- 1) First up is permaculture design. This is a skill that requires basic knowledge of many things, so it can be intimidating at first, but it's not as difficult as it may seem. Essentially, it involves recognizing pre-existing patterns and making decisions accordingly. Observe, do fields tests, do whatever you can to understand a piece of land, (how does water behave on this piece of land, what is the pH, how much organic matter is in this soil, how much sun does it get, etc.) and then simply decide which plants will do well in the already existing conditions. Geoff Lawton, one of the biggest names in permaculture has some very good videos on youtube called Lawton's Guide To Permaculture Design And Strategy. He also has a few on his website, <http://www.geofflawton.com>. Good ones on the website are “5 Acre Abundance on a Budget” which is about one specific piece of land that he was working on, but it's a good example of how to see patterns and understand the potential of a piece of land, and “Absolute In Abundance”, which is not about a specific piece of land, and is more general. To see these video you do have to submit your email, but it is a good resource if you are okay with that. You will also get access to many other potentially useful videos as well.

- 2) Hydrology is often the first element to understand when it comes to designing a good permaculture system. It is important to know how water acts, because it is fundamental to life.



A tomato plant with Tobacco Mosaic Virus. It is important to be able to identify diseases that your plants might be carrying.
Image taken from <http://www.erec.ifas.ufl.edu>

Brad Lancaster is arguably the permaculture authority on all things water and fortunately he has many good videos online as well. They usually cover water harvesting methods, understanding basic principles of hydrology, and how to build and use tools for hydrology work.

- 3) Plant pathology is the study of diseases in plants. It can be a

fairly dry subject; much of it is identification and memorization, but it is important to become familiar with prevalent diseases and vectors of diseases in your area. Some diseases or infections only affect certain crop families, some can live in many climates, some in only very specific conditions, etc. Become acquainted with the ones that might go after your plants.

- 4) Soil science includes understanding how to measure pH, what type of soil you're working with, improving soil structure, soil biology, what chemicals and nutrients are in the soil, and other subjects too. For some things (chemical tests), you might need to send samples to a lab. This can be expensive. But other tests are very simple to do, like soil texture tests. These can be done by simply putting some soil in a jar filled with water, agitating it, letting it settle over the next few days, and then using the "soil texture triangle" by comparing the amounts of sand, silt, and clay in your jar.
- 5) Mycology is the study of fungi. Often underutilized in permaculture, fungi are a very important element in any ecosystem. Mycorrhizal fungi associate with plants and can greatly increase the plant's health and your yield, while saprotrophic fungi are decomposers and help recycle nutrients back into the system. Many fungi also form mushrooms which can be grown relatively easily, and mycelium has many ecologically beneficial functions as well.
- 6) Remediation is the process of cleaning up a piece of land, both on the surface, and below ground. This is a long and involved process, but it is an unfortunate necessity in many urban areas where industry has made the soil toxic. Certain plants, fungi, and bacteria can be used in succession to pull out the toxins, degrade them, or make them inert. It is highly recommended that there be at least one member of your group who familiarizes themselves with remediation techniques.



A simple soil texture test shows the different particulates settling in distinct layers.

image taken from <http://www.blog.gardenharvestsupply.com/2011/10/18/ghs-guide-to-soil-and-soil-testing-part-2/>



People working together to build swales - A common water harvesting method used in permaculture

image taken from <http://www.plantingjustice.org/swales>

These are just a few things to get the ball rolling that you might want to read up on. There are a million other specialized areas of study and skills that are worth looking into as well. Maybe in researching one of these subjects, you will be drawn towards something else. Again, these are just a starting point. Time spent studying is not time wasted, and it is always good to have a solid foundation before you go out and practice these things.

WHERE TO START

Taking action is the next step, but what does that mean? And what makes an action successful? Taking action can be anything from going hiking in the woods with the intent of brushing up on plant identification, to helping a neighbor set up a garden, to sneaking onto a piece of land in the dead of night to place mycofilters near a stream where farm runoff frequently flows. “Action” is what you make of it, but make *something* of it. The internet is a great teacher, but experience infinitely better, so go out there and get your hands dirty. If you and your group of Radical Permaculturalists feels like they can take on your town's government to get them to clean up a polluted area, go for it! If they think they have no chance of appealing to your town's leaders, but they think they can do it by themselves, go for it! Whatever methods you decide to use, be thoughtful, and know the consequences of your actions. A successful well-planned action is worth more than any poorly planned botched ones. Make sure you and your group have a firm grasp on what you are doing. In many cases, a situation can quickly be made worse than it was before if there is a lack of understanding going into it, and keep in mind that your actions can effect people other than just you and your friends.

Another key component of action is education. It's great for your group members to know how to design a good permaculture system, build hugelkulture beds, remediate damaged landscapes, graft, clone, or identify plants, make tinctures and balms, or do a million other things, but a few people can only do so much by themselves, and personal and community autonomy is one of the goals of Radical Permaculture. This means education.

Effective education can manifest itself in many different ways depending on the atmosphere and intended outcomes. It can be an open-ended discussion, a hands-on workshop, a video on the internet, or even a party, given the right context (parties or shows can be a good way to raise funds for future projects, too). There are many ways to get people engaged, and being a good teacher is an art in and of itself that can sometimes be hard to learn. First of all, remember to treat people with respect. We've all had a teacher who talks to their students as if they are incapable of understanding. Do not be that teacher. If someone is coming to hear you talk, it is safe to assume that they want to learn, and that alone deserves respect. Also, do not assume that you have nothing to learn from others simply because you are the one presenting. Understand that simply by taking on the role of teacher, you are entering into a specific power dynamic with those that want to learn from you. This is not necessarily a bad thing, but you should be mindful of it. While it can be empowering to be the teacher, always remember that the end goal is for the students to be empowered, so that they can go and apply their new skills in whatever ways they themselves choose to.

As mentioned before, it can be helpful to know someone who has experience setting up events and/or has connections to people or places that can host you. Oftentimes, the DIY approach is the easiest. If someone in your group has a garage, basement, or living room that can fit a bunch of people in it, use that. If there are any Free Schools, community centers, infoshops, or other spaces like that in your area, they would probably be happy to have you. But you won't know until you ask, so put yourself out there. Just saying that you are part of an organization oftentimes goes a long way in getting people to agree to host you, so it might be helpful come up with a name for your group (or just say you're the local chapter of Radical Permaculture if you can't think of a name!)

NETWORKING

Now that you've got a good crew together and you've been active in the community, you'll want to start branching out. Hopefully during your time teaching and carrying out various projects, you've made some connections. This could be anyone from your neighbor down the street, who just stopped by during a workshop to see what all those people were doing in your garage, to the old organic farming master who heard about your group on the internet, to anybody in between. Some of these people are going to be your best friends when it comes to networking.

Earlier, it was mentioned that maintaining a smaller group can oftentimes be more effective than expanding. If you do find yourself in the position of having the same people consistently showing up to your group's events, encourage them to start their own group. This allows your group to stay small and gives those people a good place to start from. Even if you don't consistently get the same people showing up, you should be encouraging folks to organize.

If you live in a big city and have built up enough momentum that you know a lot of people interested in starting Radical Permaculture collectives, maybe stratifying yourselves into different levels of organization would be a good idea. You probably won't want to split up your own group of friends since you've all worked hard to create that group and work well together. However, you might want to assign members of your own group to other groups for a period of time to help them get started. This way you can help create a network of people who all have a similar vision, and you'll also be connected to each of these groups since they will know at least one of your own group members pretty well. All of these collectives will be free to pursue their own projects, but you should stay in touch. There may be a time when you need to plan a large event where you need as many people as you can get, to borrow a tool from someone, or even just to hang out! The end result should be multiple groups that focus on their particular geographical area, but can reach out to any other collective(s) for help, and can come together as a whole when they need to to support each other.

In a smaller town, it might be harder to build up that momentum. But if you are continuously making an effort to make knowledge available, chances are somebody will listen. If you are in the position where you have only a few interested people as opposed to a large group, invite them to work with your group. It can be a good way to see if they fit in well with everybody that you are already working with, as well as get them accustomed to doing hands-on work. If they work well with everybody else, maybe your group could expand by a few members. Every new member has their own set of connections and knowledge that can be useful.

(A SIDE NOTE ON OUT OF TOWN CONNECTIONS) If you've managed to make some good connections within your town, even without having a well organized federation of Radical Permaculture collectives, chances are good that someone in your newly expanded network of friends will have connections to out of towners. Build good relationships with these people. The time may come when you want to share your experiences as a Radical Permaculturalist outside the boundaries of your own town, and in this case, it will be a huge relief to already have connections to people that can help you set up events or crash on their couches. Even if you never plan on going to other cities, you should still help other who want to create a movement in their own areas. Even just talking on the internet, sharing links, or maybe sending seeds or cuttings via snail mail can be a great way to build a connection with people in other places and build resources for both your movement and theirs.

GET OUT THERE!

Now that you've read this zine, you should have a basic idea of what Radical Permaculture is and how to implement it. This zine is only intended to be an introduction to these ideas. Hopefully you've learned something from it, but know that this text can't teach you as much as you can teach yourself by going out there and getting people together to improve their communities. We can't wait for other people to fix the problems in our communities, we have to do it ourselves! So read up, make some connections, and get your shovels out!

RESOURCES:

<http://wildidahorisingtidedotcom.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/earth-first-direct-action-manual3.pdf>

Earth First! Direct action manual. Contains information regarding direct action, including (but not limited to) how to build the necessary tools for direct action, legal information, group organization, and safety.

<https://libcom.org/files/FreirePedagogyoftheOppressed.pdf>

Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Friere. A great critical analysis on the relationship between student and teacher. A very important book in radical history.

<http://charlottesierraclub.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/grassroots-organizing-training-manual.pdf>

The Sierra Club's grassroots organizing manual. Full of good information on grassroots campaigning and how to communicate with people in your community.

<http://earthrepair.ca/>

Earth Repair by Leila Darwish. No PDF, but the book is well worth the money. Covers phytoremediation, mycoremediation, and microbial remediation, as well as containing many interviews with people involved in grassroots bioremediation and lots of informative graphics. The website contains other useful resources as well. The book will be a remediator's best friend.

<http://radicalmycology.com/>

Radical Mycology. Similar in concept to Radical Permaculture, but with an emphasis on fungi. They teach low tech, simple methods of cultivation and remediation and aim to shed some light on the fungal kingdom, which is so often neglected by many.

<http://www.biodiverseed.com/>

"BiodiverSeed is a seed swap network, devoted to the exchange of primarily self-harvested, organic, and heirloom seeds, with the goal of preserving maximum genetic diversity. BiodiverSeed is also a mapping project, creating a global database of seed swaps, seed libraries, heirloom seed sellers, community gardens, and food sovereignty organizations."

<https://ia902606.us.archive.org/4/items/BuildingADiyGuideToCreatingSpacesHostingEventsAndFosteringRadical/building.pdf>

A zine from DoDIY.org about hosting events and building safe spaces. More focused on hosting shows,

but same info applies to holding workshops or lectures.

<https://ia902605.us.archive.org/5/items/HowToPromoteEvents/how-to-promote-events-print.pdf>

A zine put out by the Beehive Collective about promoting events (beehivecollective.org is also a good resource, they are arguably one of the few already existing Radical Permaculture groups).

https://ia801405.us.archive.org/10/items/OrganisingCommunities/organizing_communities-2008_version.pdf

A zine by Tom Knoche about community organizing from an Anarchist perspective. Lots of good information and very well written.

https://ia902609.us.archive.org/7/items/SharedPathSharedGoal/shared_path_shared_goal.pdf

“Shared Path Shared Goal”. A short zine about the process of consensus-based decision making.

https://ia902605.us.archive.org/27/items/CollectiveProcessOvercomingPower/collective_process_overcoming_power.pdf

“Overcoming Power”. A zine by the Common Wheel Collective about solving issues that may arise in non-hierarchical groups.

<http://permies.com>

A wealth of knowledge related to all things permaculture, including a very active forum.